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STATEMENT MADE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON 24 APRIL 1991 TO THE INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE QUESTION OF WESTERN SAHARA

1. This report is submitted to the Security Council in pursuance of its resolution 658 (1990), by which it approved the previous report (S/21360), containing the plan for the implementation of the proposals for a settlement of the question of Western Sahara accepted by the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO. In paragraph 5 of that resolution, the Council requested the Secretary-General to transmit to it as soon as possible a further detailed report on his implementation plan, containing in particular an estimate of the cost of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), on the understanding that the further report should be the basis on which the Council would authorize the establishment of MINURSO.

2. This report reflects the results of the intensive and painstaking efforts that have been made over recent months with a view to implementing the settlement proposals accepted by the two parties in August 1988 in the most impartial, effective and economical manner possible.

Towards this end, therefore, I have taken into account, as far as possible, the viewpoints expressed by the parties. I remain convinced that the joint proposals made by the current Chairman of OAU and the United Nations Secretary-General in August 1988, the Secretary-General's implementation plan and the arrangements set out in my current report, constitute a fair and practical means of achieving the objective which has been set by the General Assembly and endorsed by the Security Council, namely the holding of a free, fair and impartial referendum for the people of Western Sahara, organized and conducted by the United Nations in cooperation with OAU.

3. No effort has been spared in seeking to achieve savings in respect of the estimated expenditures for MINURSO and to keep to a minimum both the duration of the Mission and the human and material resources needed to fulfil its mandate.

(a) The overall cost of MINURSO is at present estimated at $US 200 million. This figure includes expenditures for the repatriation

programme of the High Commissioner for Refugees amounting to some $34 million, which is to be financed from voluntary contributions. I believe, however, that repatriation should not be considered solely as a humanitarian activity but rather as a political element that is crucial to the operation's success. Consequently, I consider that the voluntary contributions needed for the implementation of the repatriation plan must be paid in full before the deployment of MINURSO on D-Day. I hope that other additional voluntary contributions will be made, in whatever form. Such contributions, which could cover, inter alia, expenditures for the air transport of personnel, equipment for the deployment of MINURSO, air transport in the mission area, and the costs of accommodation and other facilities, have been estimated at $50 million. These contributions would further reduce the estimates of expenditure and the savings thus achieved would be returned to Member States in the form of credits against their contributions to the MINURSO budget. I am at present holding consultations with certain Member States on this subject.

(b) As regards the duration of the MINURSO operation, it has been possible, pursuant to consultations with the two parties, to reduce this to 36 weeks, without in any way jeopardizing the conditions necessary for the operation's success. It should be underscored, however, that the time allotted for each of the stages is indicative and may be modified by my Special Representative, after consultations with me, should circumstances so require.

4. Four essential conditions must be met if MINURSO is to be able to discharge its responsibilities effectively and with complete impartiality:

- First, MINURSO must at all times have the full support of the Security Council;

- Second, it must operate with the full cooperation of the two parties;

- Third, it must be able to count fully on the cooperation and support of the neighbouring countries, namely, Algeria and Mauritania; I have been given assurances in this regard;

- Fourth, the necessary financial resources must be provided by Member States in full and in a timely manner.

In this connection, I am recommending that, should the Council decide to establish MINURSO, the expenditures of the Mission should be considered as expenses of the Organization to be borne by Member States in accordance with Article 17, paragraph 2, of the Charter. I therefore intend to recommend to the General Assembly that the assessments to be levied on Member States should be credited to a special account to be established for this purpose.

5. I shall, of course, keep the Council fully informed of the implementation of the settlement proposals and the operation of MINURSO. All matters which might have an impact on the nature of the Mission will be put before the Council so that it may take a position on them.

6. I recommend that the Security Council decide to authorize the establishment of MINURSO as soon as possible, in order to avoid any further delay in the settlement of the question of Western Sahara and to hasten the restoration of peace and stability in the region. I also recommend that the Council decide that the transitional period - following the announcement of a cease-fire - should begin approximately 16 weeks after the General Assembly approves the MINURSO budget. I further recommend that the budget should be adopted without change and that it should be reviewed after six months, at which time any necessary adjustments can be made.

7. Through the effective organization and supervision of the referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara, the United Nations in cooperation with OAU will be taking on a complex operation involving responsibilities unequalled in similar operations in the past.

8. The success of the operation, preparation of which has had the unanimous backing of the international community, will be a further affirmation of the right of peoples to self-determination and an important contribution to the maintenance of peace, which are two fundamental Charter objectives. At the same time, success in this endeavour will be a new achievement that cannot but enhance the credit and prestige of the Organization at a time when demands on its services for the settlement of situations of conflict or tension are increasing.